

2077

THE
LIFE *and* BEHAVIOUR
OF

JOHN SKINNER,

Who was Executed *August* 29, 1746, at
CHELMSFORD in *ESSEX*
FOR THE
Murder of DANIEL BRETT,
(his late Servant) the 23d of *May*, 1744.

CONTAINING

- | | |
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| <p>I. A true Account of his Birth, Family, Education, and being put Apprentice to an eminent Oilman near St. Andrew's Church in Holborn.</p> <p>II. His Marriage to a young Lady of good Family and Fortune in Essex, and setting up for himself without Aldgate; with the gay Manner in which he liv'd.</p> <p>III. His cruel Usage to his Wife, whose Company he deserted for the Sake of Town Ladies, so that she was obliged to go into the Parish Workhouse.</p> <p>IV. His becoming a Bankrupt, and retiring to Rum-</p> | <p>ford, where he kept an Inn, and afterwards commenc'd Smuggler.</p> <p>V. His shooting his Servant, for which he fled; his being apprehended; Commitment; Copies of the Affidavits made relating to the Murder; and his Trial at the Bar.</p> <p>VI. His Deportment under Condemnation; a Letter to his Friend; and how he stabb'd himself the Morning of his Execution, to avoid a shameful Death.</p> <p>VII. His Advice to all the Smugglers; his Behaviour and dying Words at the Place of Execution.</p> |
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L O N D O N:

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T H E
LIFE *and* BEHAVIOUR
O F
JOHN SKINNER.



HIS Malefactor, of whom we are about to speak, committed the Murder for which he suffered, on the 23d of *May*, 1744, and absconded for the said Murder, but was, several Months after the Fact, apprehended, and committed to the County Gaol of *Chelmsford*, by Virtue of a Certificate granted by the Clerk of the Peace for the County of *Essex*, certifying, that a Bill of Indictment was found by the Grand Inquest against the said *John Skinner*, for *Wilful Murder*, at *Chelmsford* aforesaid, at the Summer Assizes,

The Affidavits, which here follow, taken on Oath relating to the Murder, are copied from the Originals, and as they will give the best Light into the Nature of the Offence, it is thought proper to publish them: And after this, his Trial, &c. shall be inserted; as also his Behaviour after Sentence of Death was passed upon him.



AFFIDAVITS *relating to the* *Death of Daniel Brett.*

ESSEX To-wit,

The Examination of Elizabeth Cooper, of the Parish of St. Giles, Colchester, Single-woman, taken on Oath before me this 26th Day of May, 1744, touching the Death of Daniel Brett, lately deceased.

THIS Examinant on her Corporal Oath, saith, That on *Wednesday* last, about Eight of the Clock in the Evening of the

the same Day, her Master came home to his House, standing on a Heath called the *Old Heath*, in the Parish of *St. Giles*, in *Colchester*; it being reported to him that he had lost some Goods, he flew in a Passion, and said, that he would have his Goods again, for he had ventured his Life for them once, and would venture his Life again for them, for that he would either Kill or be Killed; that he called for a Dram, which she gave him, and immediately thereupon he went out of the House, mounted his Horse, and rode off about half an Hour after Eight at Night: And that (as she believes) about three or four Hours afterwards, the said Mr. *Skinner* called to this Examinant, and told her, she must get up this Minute, which she did, and came to the Window, and desired him for God's sake to tell her what was the Matter. He speaking in a Hurry, and seemingly confused, saith, that he then made no Answer, but, turned from the House, and rid full Speed towards *Colchester*, but for what she could not tell. Saith, that after she did come down she alighted a Candle, and renewed her Fire to sit by, expecting that he would come home again soon after: But saith, that her Master was not long gone from her the last Time before the said *Daniel Brett* came into the Room (where this Examinant was) all bloody
That

That she afterwards saw a large Wound thro' his Body, and believes it was the Occasion of his Death, for that he languished from that Time till about Eleven or Twelve the next Day, and then died; and further cannot depose, only that she divers times ask'd the deceased who gave him that Wound, but he never would answer her the Question.

*Taken the Day and
Tear above-written
before me*

M. C.

Signed

Eliz. Cooper.



ESSEX To-wit,

*The Examination of John Rallett,
of the Parish of St. Giles, Col-
chester, Taylor, taken this 26th
Day of May, in the Year of our
Lord, 1744, before me, touching
the Death of Daniel Brett, de-
ceased.*

THIS Examinant on his Corporal Oath, saith, That he was sent for to Mr. John Skinner, to do Business as a Taylor,
at

at his House on *Wednesday* the 23^d Instant:
 That said *Skinner* was out most Part of the
 Day, and a little after Eight of the Clock in
 the Evening of the said Day, the said Mr.
Skinner came in, and upon his coming in his
 House-keeper (whose Name this Examinant
 doth not know) who goes by the Name of
Elizabeth, said to Mr. *Skinner*, that some
 Person or some Things, but who she meant,
 or what Things, this Examinant cannot say,
 were in such a Place ; but did not understand
 the said Place, their Discourse being in a low
 Tone: But saith, that the said *Skinner* flew
 into a violent Passion at what she had informed
 him, and bid him fetch his Powder-Horn
 (which was produced) for I will shoot him as
 dead as a Carrion-Crow, and then let him go,
 and ask Pardon of God Almighty. That he
 saw the said *Skinner* load his Carbine, and at
 his going out said the following Words ; *Now*
for Conquest, Liberty or Death; and the next
 Day heard that he had shot the Deceased about
 three Hours after he departed from his said
 Dwelling-House.

Taken the Day and
Year above-written
before me

M. C.

Signed by

John Rallet.

ESSEX

ESSEX To-wit,

*The Examination of Thomas Page,
of St. Giles, Colchester, Vic-
tualler, taken before me this 26th
Day of May, 1744, at his own
Dwelling - House, touching the
Death of Daniel Brett, lately
deceased.*

THIS Examinant on his Corporal Oath,
saith, That Mr. *John Skinner*, of the
said Parish of *St. Giles*, came to the Exami-
nant's House on Horseback, on *Wednesday* last,
about Ten of the Clock in the Night of the
same Day, and enquired for the said *Daniel
Brett*; but being told he was not there, he
answered this Examinant in a great Passion,
and swore bitterly, that let him find where he
would he would shoot him dead that Night:
And that next Day about Noon this Examinant
was informed, that he had shot him accord-
ingly the Night he said he would.

*Taken the Day and
Year above-written
before me*

M. C.

Signed by

Thomas Page.

ESSEX

ESSEX To-wit,

*The Examination of Tho. Brand,
of Colchester, in the said County,
Surgeon, taken on Oath before
me this 26th Day of May, 1744,
touching the Death of Daniel
Brett, lately deceased.*

THIS Examinant on his Corporal Oath,
saith, That in the Night of the 23d
of May Instant, one *John Skinner*, of the
Parish of *St. Giles* aforesaid, came to this Exa-
minant's House between Twelve and One
o'Clock, and called this Examinant up, de-
siring this Examinant's Assistance, telling him
a Man was shot, and was in fear he was dead
or would die, and desired this Examinant to
go with him immediately. That before this
Examinant went from his own House, having
just Reason to believe from the Behaviour of
the said *Skinner*, that the said *Skinner* had
himself shot the said Person, this Examinant
asked him, *What he shot him with?* Said
Skinner replied, with my, or a Carbine, and
described the Distance which he shot him at.
That he this Examinant went to the said

B

Skinner's,

Skinner's, and there found a Man, *viz.* one *Daniel Brett*, late Servant to the said *Skinner*, as he is informed, mortally wounded in his Body, as this Examinant then apprehended, for that he by Probing and Searching the Wound found his Bowels much lacerated and torn : That he went again to the said Person the next Day about Nine in the Morning, and found him alive, but upon his going in the Afternoon of the same Day, found him dead, that the said Wound was the Occasion of his Death. And further saith, that the Wound was of a triangular Form, of about half an Inch long and as much wide, and about ten Inches deep.

*Taken the Day and
Year above-written
before me*

M. C.

Signed by

Thomas Brand.



ESSEX To-wit,

*The Examination of Clement Bore-
ham, of East Denyland, in the
said County, Butcher, taken on
Oath*

(II)
*Oath before me this 26th Day of
May, in the Year of our Lord
1744, touching the Death of
Daniel Brett deceased.*

THIS Examinant on his Corporal Oath, saith, That on *Thursday* last, about Two or Three o'Clock in the Afternoon of the same Day, hearing that one Mr. *John Skinner* had shot *Daniel Brett*, his Man-Servant, about an Hour afterwards, went to see the said *Brett*, and found him dead, as reported. That about Ten of the Clock of the same *Thursday* Night, hearing that the said *Skinner* had some Pigs and a couple of Cows to sell, this Deponent went in search of the said *Skinner*, to buy the said Goods. That he went to him on a Heath called *Denyland Heath*, which is about a Mile from the Place where he shot the said *Brett*, as reported, where he found him in Company with four or five People conveying away Goods in Bags or Sacks, which this Examinant took to be smuggled Goods, he having been deemed a Smuggler for many Years past. And this Examinant further saith, that after they had had some Talk about the Cows and Pigs, one *Bavan*, the Wife of one *Henry Bavan*, and present with this Examinant, asked the said *Skinner* how he could be

so passionate to shoot the poor Man (meaning the said *Brett*). To which Mr. *Skinner* replied in the hearing of this Examinant, *I wish I had been in Heaven; I am an unfortunate Man, and wish I had never done it.* And further cannot set forth.

*Taken the Day and
Year above-written
before me*

M. C.

Signed by

Clement Boreham.



Mr. *Skinner*, as before observed, having withdrawn himself out of his Neighbourhood, to prevent being apprehended for the Murder, and continuing *incog.* for some Time, thinking all was forgot, he came again into the Country, and on the 29th of *April* last he went to the Copy-hold Court at *Brightlingsea* in *Essex*, to be admitted to the Estate of 15 *l. per Annum*, with as much Assurance as if he had been guilty of no Crime whatever, or without Dread of being brought to Justice. But Mr. *Graves*, the Steward of the Court, being informed, that a Bill was found against him (the Prisoner) for *Wilful Murder*, that Gentleman caus'd him to be secur'd, and he was committed to *Chelmsford Gaol.*

At

At the Time of his Commitment, he had plenty of Money, and was indulged in every Thing in the Prison so far as was consistent with the Keeper's Safety; though, in Fact, he never once attempted to Escape, being well assur'd that he should be acquitted on his Trial, though all his Friends were of a contrary Opinion.

On *Friday* the 15th of *August* he was brought to the Bar, and before Sir *Michael Foster*, Knt. Judge of the Assize, he pleaded, *Not Guilty* to the Indictment; but the Murder was very fully prov'd upon him by the Parties who made the Affidavits above-written.—Mr. *Page* depos'd in Court, That about Ten at Night, on the 23d of *May* (the Night the Deceas'd was shot) *Skinner* came to his House, and said, *Daniel* (meaning the Deceas'd) *has Robb'd me, and I'll shoot him this Night, let me find him where I will.*—He was asked by the Prisoner's Council, *If the Deceas'd was not a Smuggler?* His Reply was, *He may be a Smuggler for ought I know.*

Mr. *Raillet*, the Taylor, depos'd, That he saw him (the Prisoner) load a Pistol and Carbine, at his own House, and that he went away in a great Passion, vowing speedy Revenge against the Deceas'd.

And

And the other Witnesses having proved a premeditated Malice, and every Circumstance necessary to convict him of Murder, the Jury found him *Guilty*, notwithstanding he produced in Court several Witnesses to give him the Character of a quiet, peaceable Man; but some of them could not speak to his Behaviour for some Time past.

There being no other Person capitally convicted at this Assize, the Prisoner was set to the Bar to receive Judgment on his Conviction, and the Judge pass'd the Sentence upon him in a very moving Speech, which seem'd to shock *Skinner* very much, and he was observ'd to shed Tears.

As he was a Man as well known in *Essex* as any one in the County, there was a great Concourse of People in Court, and the Prisoner behaved with Modesty and Decency. As soon as he had received Sentence, he was conveyed back to the Prison, and greater Care taken of him than had been all along during the Time of his Confinement, which made him uneasy; and because the Keepers kept a strict Eye on him, he said (the Day after his Condemnation, seemingly in a Passion) *You need not look so sharp after me, for I don't want to run away.*

Before the Judges left *Chelmsford*, the Kalendar was sent to the Sheriff, and from him

to the Keeper, ordering *John Skinner* for Execution on *Friday* the 29th of *August*, 1746. Of this he was informed, which shock'd him very much; but yet he was still in hopes of being repriev'd. Petitions were written, and, by his Friends, delivered to the Judge, and Interest made to his Majesty to save his Life; but all the Applications of his Friends were to no Purpose.

Finding that he must Die, he put on a very melancholy Countenance, seem'd to pray heartily, listen'd attentively to the Divine who attended him, and pretended that he had much rather die than live. — He would frequently feign himself much indisposed, wishing for Death, and that the happy Day would come when he should be releas'd from his Troubles. — It is thought that his Behaviour in general was no more than a Feint or Artifice, to get some Indulgence of the Gaoler whereby he might facilitate his Escape; for it will appear from his Conduct before his Death, that he had an utter Aversion to *Hanging*.

Whilst he was under Sentence, he employ'd some Part of his Time in Writing; and the following Lines (amongst other Things) he wrote on a half Sheet of Paper; and a Copy of it having been obtained, is inserted *verbatim*. It was intended as a Letter to some
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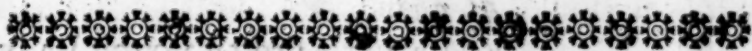
of his Acquaintance in *London* ; for, as we apprehended, he never designed it to be published.

My dear Friend,

‘ **A** L L that my Friends can do for me
 ‘ cannot save me; and I am greatly
 ‘ shock’d at my approaching Fate, because I
 ‘ no more expected to die for *Daniel’s* Affair
 ‘ than you did. It’s all the Doings of *Tom*
 ‘ *P——*, and that Rogue *——*. I was bewitch’d to come home, for you know you
 ‘ always perswaded me to stay on t’other Side
 ‘ of the Water, or to keep in *London*. That
 ‘ Man who meddles with another’s Wife is
 ‘ sooner or later, brought to Destruction. —
 ‘ You know what I mean; — that *Jobb* has
 ‘ brought all this Mife y upon me. — What
 ‘ a terrible Shock it is for me to lay here in
 ‘ Irons, within a few Hours of Death, when
 ‘ you know how genteely I have liv’d in the
 ‘ World? Here’s an End of all my Equipage
 ‘ and Grandeur, and poor *Skinner* is no more.
 ‘ To be expos’d to a gazing Mob of Rabble,
 ‘ and unthinking silly People, has a greater
 ‘ Effect on me than Death, and I could wish
 ‘ to die in the Goal where I am. — I suppose
 ‘ *Mr. G——* and *Tom W——s* have heard
 ‘ of this, for I have read it in the *Col-*
 ‘ *chester*.

chester and Ipswich News-Papers, and I know that Tom has them always sent over to him. — I don't expect any of my Acquaintance to come to see me, nor do I desire any, because my Time is so short; therefore God bless you and yours,

Chelmsford Prison, Your dying Friend,
Aug. 21. 1746. J. SKINNER.



A True ACCOUNT of the LIFE of JOHN SKINNER, who was hang'd at Chelmsford, for the Murder of DANIEL BRETT, his late Servant. Written by a Gentleman who attended him, and to whom he related every Thing herein inserted.

JOHN SKINNER, (well known amongst the Smugglers at Bologne in France, by the Name of *Saucy Jack* or *Colchester Jack*) was near 39 Years of Age, born of very creditable and substantial Parents in the County of *Essex*, who gave him an Education suitable to their Circumstances, and at a proper

proper Age, put him Apprentice to Mr. S—t, an eminent wholesale Oilman, &c. not far from St. Andrew's Church in *Holborn*, with whom he served his Apprenticeship. As he was always greatly indulged in his juvenile Years, he took such Liberties as did not very well become an Apprentice; but all those little Flights were passed over, and when his Servitude was expired, his Parents set him up in the Business, in a neat and well furnished Shop without *Alcgate*.

Having married a very pretty young Lady of the County of *Essex*, of a good Family, and about 5000l. Fortune, the Interest of her Relations and his own, amongst the trading Part of that Country (in his Way) recommended him to a great deal of Business; and in a short Time he served the better Part of the County; and the Neighbourhood thereof.

Now finding himself in Possession of his Wife's Fortune, and that he was a very considerable Gainer by his Business, he began to launch out into all Manner of Debauchery, particularly Gaming and Whoring, and to very extravagant was he in the last Article, that he declared he has been at a Bawdy-House for ten Days successively and spent 60 or 70 l. when he should have been at Home minding his Business.

His Servants finding what an irregular Course of Life their Master led, soon took an Advantage of his Absence, and confiscated some Part of his Monies and Goods to their own Use; for on casting up his Books at Times when he was sober, and reflecting on his own bad Behaviour, he found himself very deficient; and frequently complained: He did not charge any one in particular with defrauding him; but observed where a Man in Business is too frequently absent, the taking of Money, under an indolent Master, would even in Time corrupt an honest Servant.

His poor Wife, sorrowful, and neglected at Home, knew not what Step to take: She, for a long Time, was unwilling to acquaint her Parents in what a lavish Manner her Spouse was consuming her Fortune. As soon as she had the Happiness of his Company, she gave him the best Advice she was capable of, without the least Reflection on his Conduct; but he was one of those *sine* Gentlemen *that could not bear being talk'd to by a Woman.*—But happy would it have been for him, if he had given himself Time to hear her Remonstrances; for as she was a Woman of a liberal Education, very agreeable in her Person, and pretty well acquainted with the Nature of his Business, it cannot be supposed

that she ever said any Thing to him, but what a Husband from a Wife could bear to hear.—She is now living, and brought to Ruin and Misery by the Extravagance of one, who in Duty, and the solemn Tie of Matrimony, ought to have comforted and supported her.

Tho' Mr. *Skinner* kept a Brace or two of fine Geldings, and Servants in Livery, yet he seldom was so Complaisant to make his Wife a Party in his Pleasures; for whenever he went Abroad, (which was too often) some demolish'd Beau, Gamester, Sharper, (what is worse) or Bawdy-house Keeper, were his constant Companions; and he was so well known among those Gentry, that he got the Name of 'Squire *Skinner*.

In a few Years this Course of Life brought his Affairs in so bad a Situation, that being unable to make good his Payments to his Creditors, a Commission of Bankruptcy was taken out against him; and his Creditors appearing before the Commissioners to make out their Depts, it was found that he ow'd upwards of 10,000 l. tho' on closing the Commission (to do him Justice) he was able to pay 15 s. in the Pound. — *A very handsome Composition for a Man who had so little minded his Affairs.*

Having obtained his Certificate, he thought no more of his own Business; for having a great

great many Acquaintance, he took an Inn at *Rumford*, (now the *King's-Head*) and had very pretty Trade, particularly amongst the Smugglers.

Understanding what large Profits were gain'd in the Smuggling Way, he left his Inn, and commenc'd Smuggler, and then removed to *Colchester* in *Essex*. He now left his poor Wife to the wide World, and kept Company with Women of very bad Character: His Wife was reduc'd to such Extremity, that she was oblig'd to go into the Parish Workhouse, and tho' he could have very well afforded it, he never sent to her in her greatest Necessity one single Shilling.

One *P——e*, who was a principal Witness against him, was greatly incens'd at *Skinner's* decoying his Wife from him; and indeed this is thought to be the reason that the Prosecution was carried on against him. He had deluded a great many Women, as well married as single; for being a personable Man, he but seldom (as he often said) found much Difficulty in making Conquests of the Fair Sex. But notwithstanding all this boasting of his, it was remark'd, that none but Women of a light Reputation car'd to be seen in his Company.

Skinner was accounted as great a Smuggler as any in the County of *Essex*; tho' the bet-

ter

ter to disguise his Way of Life he rented two Farms, known by the Names of the *Tan-Office* and *Cox's Farm*, each at 20l. *per Annum*, situate at *Old Heath*, in *St. Giles's Parish, Colchester*.

The Occasion of his committing the Murder for which he suffered was, that the Deceased, who had been his Servant, or rather Partner, without his Knowledge came, and took some Goods away that they had Smuggled together; and this *Skinner* resented so much, that on his House-keeper's telling him, when he came home, what had happened, he immediately concluded to murder him; which he accordingly did, as has been before related.

He very much labour'd, on his first Commitment to *Chelmsford Gaol*, to make the World believe, that the Occasion of his shooting at the Deceas'd was, that he was attempting to rob him; but this gain'd no Credit with any Body; tho' he made it a part of his Defence on his Trial.

After his Condemnation he still deny'd, as he had done before, that he had any premeditated Malice against the Deceased; and as a Justification of what he said, appealed to every one who spoke with *Brett*, whether he ever charg'd him with the Murder. But this is easily answer'd, for the Deceas'd was so very

very bad, after he received his Death-Wound, that he could hardly speak, and what he uttered, was chiefly broken Words, scarcely intelligible,

Notwithstanding *Elizabeth Cooper*, his House-keeper, at the Time of the Commission of the Murder, made an Affidavit of what pass'd, so far as to her own Knowledge, yet on his Trial, she did not appear: So that it is beyond Dispute, that she kept out of the Way (no Doubt at *Skinner's* Instigation) that her Testimony might not prejudice him.

As to the Religion he profess'd it was the establish'd Church of *England*; of which he declared himself a very unworthy Member.

He advis'd abundance of Smugglers, who came to visit him in the Goal, never to trust their Servants with their Secrets, especially to keep them ignorant where their Goods were deposited; because (said he) if you don't submit to their Humours, they'll not only inform against you, but rob you of whatever they can. — He said the Kin lost more Duties annually by Lace-Smugglers than all the Smugglers in the Kingdom beside, and that he was sure more *French* Laces were annually worn in the three Kingdoms, than paid Duty in ten Years,

He did not deny, but that, since the *French* War, Smugglers carried Intelligence to many
Parts

Parts of *France*, what was doing in these Kingdoms, and what Shipping was fitting out; for which the *French* amply rewarded them, and they always had free Liberty to land in any Port they had a mind to, for carrying on their wicked Purposes.



The Day of his EXECUTION.

IN the Morning, when the Keeper went to inform him that he must prepare himself to go to Death, he was greatly terrify'd; and it was soon discovered, by an Effusion of Blood in the Room, that he had stabb'd himself, and a Surgeon was immediately sent for, who came accordingly, and, on searching him, found that he was stabbed in the Belly with a small Knife, which was run in with such Force, that it was lodg'd in his Body, (Handle and all) and the Surgeon with much Difficulty extracted it, and sew'd up the Wound.

He was then led to Church, supported by two of the Keeper's Men (being very feeble) and after hearing Prayers, he went to the Gallows, where there was a numerous Crowd of Spectators.

He made no Speech, not being able to speak After a short Prayer, the Executioner did his Office; and hanging the usual Time, he was cut down, and his Body carried to *Colchester*, where it was decently interr'd.

F I N I S.



